

FIG LEAVES

Volume 14 Issue 11

November 2005

November FIG Meeting: Sunday, 20 November (Date Change!)



**Jean-Paul Sartre,
As Remembered by
Tim Madigan**
Movie & Videos: 3-5:30 PM
Main program: 7 PM



This year is the 100th anniversary of the birth of Jean-Paul Sartre. Our old friend Tim Madigan will discuss the life and writings of this influential humanist, controversialist and existentialist. He will discuss Sartre's ongoing influence, not only on philosophy, but on the wider area of the arts, literature, theatre, and films. Tim will comment on the unorthodox relationship between Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir.

Since this event will take place on a Sunday, we are planning to show existential movies and videos in the afternoon, take a break for dinner, and return for the talk by Tim at our regular meeting time, 7 PM.

Our afternoon session will feature a movie version of Sartre's play, *The Respectful Prostitute*, and videos of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. It will begin at 3 PM and end by 5:30 for a dinner break.

To understand and enjoy Tim's talk at the 7 PM program, it will not be necessary to have participated in the afternoon session.

Tim Madigan teaches philosophy at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York. He spoke at FIG's first program 14 years ago, and has instructed and entertained us many times over the intervening years.

Quote.....
 • Man can will nothing unless he has first understood that he must count on no
 • one but himself; that he is alone, abandoned on earth in the midst of his infinite
 • responsibilities, without help, with no other aim than the one he sets himself, with
 • no other destiny than the one he forges for himself on this earth.
 •
 • Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant* (Being and Nothingness) [1943]
 •
 • **Unquote**.....

December FIG Meeting Tuesday, 20 December 2005

Professor William Jensen will discuss "Some Recent Speculations on the Nature and Function of Religion." His talk will summarize some recent thinking on the nature and role of religion in human culture. His previous talks on Epicurus, Feuerbach, and Einstein showed his ability to make complex topics interesting and enjoyable for FIG members.

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at the Vernon Manor	
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, OH	
December Potluck	
Wednesday 14 November	
6:30 PM at the home of	
December Meeting	
Tuesday, 20 December 7:00 PM	
at the Vernon Manor	
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio	



October Meeting...

Is the US Moving Toward Theocracy?

Rabbi Robert Barr of Congregation Beth Adam



Bob Barr began by talking about his family and their summer sojourn in Europe while his wife taught at London University. On this trip he visited Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris and the grave of Captain Alfred Dreyfus whose arrest and trial revealed the deep anti-semitism persisting in France at the close of the nineteenth century and its cost to individual Jewish Frenchmen and women.

He reported he has been talking about the Religious Right and its effect on our nation for about 25 years. They have changed us and can make it worse by dividing the nation between the Religious Right and

the rest of us. He classifies them as those who take the Bible literally as the Word of God, and us, the mainstream Christians and freethinkers and non-believers as well as other faiths.

To demonstrate the change he quoted from two former presidential candidates. The first was from John F. Kennedy's speech before the Ministers' Association of Houston, Texas:

I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute; where no Catholic prelate would tell the President -- should he be Catholic -- how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote; where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference, and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him, or the people who might elect him.

and a second shorter quote from the Democratic Candidate, Senator John Kerry during the 2004 campaign: "My faith affects everything I do."

Note that the first quote was uttered about 65 years and the second about one year ago. The change in the cultural climate in this time was such, that the later Senator felt the need to wrap himself in the security blanket of his faith.

Another quote comes from the same era as the first; from Martin Luther King's speech at the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington, an excerpt from his *I Have a Dream Speech*:

In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check -- a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of



FIG Leaves - Thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons are very welcome. Submit in Electronic format via the internet to:

figleaves@fuse.net;

or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 19034, Cincinnati, OH 45219. Contributions received before the first Friday of the month will be considered for publication that month.

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now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all of God's children. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.

Notice that Martin Luther King, a Baptist minister, did not quote the Bible but the Constitution of the United States. Rabbi Barr described other indicators of cultural change, in publishing, in education, and in the media.

The Religious Right has wrapped their politics around their religion like a shroud; if you attack their politics, you attack their religion. The fundamentalists don't compromise. They are not balanced and fair despite their claims to the contrary. This is still going on and it's going to get worse.



Another well known Religious Right leader D. James Kennedy of Ft. Lauderdale in Florida. In addition to pastoring the Coral Ridge Presbyterian

Church, he is the leader of a group whose goal is the re-Christianizing of America called Reclaiming America for Christ. A quote from this promoter of the totalitarian Christian agenda indicates where this is headed:

God gave the world two mandates. The Cultural Mandate he gave at the beginning of the world, and the Great Commission he gave at the beginning of the Christian era after the resurrection of Jesus Christ; the former at the dawn of creation, the latter at the dawn of the new creation. Man is to subdue the earth and have dominion over all its creatures. This is called *The Cultural Mandate* because it deals with culture as we know it. As god's junior partners we are to rule over the earth in his name.

Scary isn't it.

A group in Ohio called Restoration Ohio, is reported in *The New York Times*: "In a manifesto that is being circulated among church leaders and on the Internet, the group, which is called the Ohio Restoration Project, is planning to mobilize two thousand evangelical, Baptist, Pentecostal, and Roman

Catholic leaders in a network of so-called Patriot Pastors to register half a million new voters, enlist activists, train candidates and endorse conservative voters' causes next year." It is a planned campaign to maximize conservative Christian voter participation in the 2006 elections. The project will engage people through a series of "pastoral policy briefings" and by recruiting two thousand "Patriot Pastors" to lead the way. They also intend to ensure that Christian Right voter guides are in widespread use.

So what can we as individuals do to stem the tide of the Religious Right's manipulation of the voting mechanism? Here are Rabbi Barr's suggestions: Take the Bible seriously. In discussions with fundamentalists, when they quote the Bible at least be aware that what they are quoting is actually there. Don't allow either Political Party to use religion as part of their argument. Become committed to the principles of our founding fathers and know what is in the Constitution.



We need to register and vote with intelligence.

Finally, Rabbi Barr made a reference to George Lakoff, UC Berkley Professor of Linguistics and cognitive science, who has investigated how conservatives have used language to dominate politics. By dictating the terms of national debate, they have put progressives firmly on the defensive. His ideas are laid out in his book: *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*.

His terminal reference was to Jim Wallis, a liberal evangelical and founder of *Sojourners Magazine* and *Call to Renewal*, a faith-based anti-poverty organization. As an evangelical, he had some instructive things to say about some well-known Religious Right promoters:

I often think that Robertson and Falwell —their roles are to be a kind of ludicrous foil for the American media. Whenever the media want somebody to say something stupid about religion, they ask Robertson and Falwell and they get what they want every time. These are not good Christian leaders. They're right wing ideologues. They're cultural fundamentalists. I don't think they're really evangelicals.

On that note, we'll close this report.

— Reported by George Maurer



Tracing the whale's trail: A paleontologist testified in the Dover school board trial about how fossils connect species.

By Lauri Lebo

York Daily Record, 15 October 2005

The ancestor of the whale and its first cousin the hippopotamus walked the Earth for forty million years, munching on plants, before dying out in the ice ages. Known as the *anthracotheres*, it became extinct 50 to 60 million years ago, but not before its evolutionary tree diverged: the whale forging into the oceans, the hippopotamus to the African swamps.

Kevin Padian, a University of California-Berkeley paleontologist, told the story of the whale's journey, along with the travels of its closest living relatives, in U.S. Middle District Court on Friday to illustrate how the fossil record connects us to our past.

In the First Amendment lawsuit over Dover Area High School's intelligent design policy, Padian was the plaintiffs' final science expert to testify. Padian's testimony was essentially a response to intelligent-design proponents' claims that paleontology does not account for missing links and the fossil record belies evolutionary theory. "The problem is that there are no clear transitional fossils linking land mammals to whales," the pro-intelligent-design textbook *Of Pandas and People* states. "How many intermediates do you need to suggest relationships?" Padian wondered. He pointed to numerous transitional fossils as he traced the lineage of the whale to its early ancestors, a group of cloven-hoofed mammals of a group named *cetartiodactyla*, illustrating the gradual changes of features along the way. "We think the transitions are pretty good," he said.

While the science of the connection between the whale and hippopotamus is recent, Padian said some of the fossils linking whales to land-dwelling mammals were known before the Civil War but were ignored by the authors of *Pandas*. But Padian, at times affectionately, showed numerous pictures and diagrams of different reptiles evolving from ones possessing scales to ones possessing feathers. About a fossil of an *archaeopteryx* found in the 1860s, Padian said, "Now this is a beautiful critter." He also criticized the book's assertions on homology, the study of similar characteristics of living organisms used to explain their relationships to other organisms.

One of the complaints of eleven parents suing the school district is that, after Dover biology students are told about intelligent design, they are referred to *Pandas*, which is housed

in the high school library. *Pandas* states, "Intelligent design means that various forms of life began abruptly through an intelligent agent, with their distinctive features already intact: fish with fins and scales, birds with feathers, beaks, and wings, etc." One of Padian's concerns with intelligent design-- the idea that life's complexities demand an intelligent designer-- is that it shuts down the search for answers, he said. "It worries me that students would be told that you can't get from A to B with natural causes," he added.

Dover defense presents case

Expert witness Michael Behe, Lehigh University biology professor, testified this morning in U.S. District court in Harrisburg that intelligent design is a scientific theory because it relies on empirical, observable facts and logical inferences. "We infer design when we see parts that appear to be arranged for a purpose," he said. Since nothing but an intelligent cause can be identified as the reason for that design-- Darwin's Theory notwithstanding-- design is "rationally justified," he said.

During direct questioning from defense attorney Robert Muise, Behe said intelligent design was like the Big Bang Theory of how the universe came to be: logical inferences based on observable fact.

– *York Daily Record*, 17 October 2005

A History Lesson
(poor old Galileo)

What did Galileo do
That made the Pope yell "libel?"
Made a telescope and saw some moons
Not mentioned in the Bible.
The Pope threw him in prison
A rotten place and mean
And forced him to bow down and say
He saw not what he'd seen.
Poor old Galileo
It's a good thing he recanted
His soul would have been sped to hell
Before his corpse was planted!

By Dorothy B. Thompson



An op-ed published in the 5 October 2005 *Mansfield News Journal*

What Makes Us Human?

By Tim Berra

Scientists from Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis and the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard published a draft sequence of the chimpanzee genome in the 1 September issue of *Nature*. This allows major scientific advances because the chimp genome can now be aligned with the human genome.

As the two genomes are so similar, the genetic mutations that have occurred since the two lineages diverged from a common ancestor about 6-8 million years ago will shed light on why humans are vulnerable to certain diseases and even on what makes us human. Each genome is about 2.8 billion units long. The units are the four nucleotides known by their first letter as A T C and G.

Chimps and humans share more than 98% of their DNA, but it is the differences that are interesting. There are several types of differences. One is a single-nucleotide substitution. Amino acids, the building blocks of proteins, are encoded by a three-letter "word". For example, the amino acid arginine is encoded by CGT. There are approximately 35 million sites where the two genomes differ by one letter of a three letter "word". This is a 1.2 % divergence.

However, the vast majority of these mutations are "silent" or neutral because of redundancy in amino acid coding. That is, CGC, CGA, CGG all code for arginine. A mutation in the third letter does not change the resulting protein and is, therefore, not subject to natural selection. This provides the background mutation rate and allows scientists to calculate when the common ancestor of chimps and humans diverged into two lineages. It also helps scientists focus on those mutations that do produce an effect that is subject to natural selection. It turns out that many of the more rapidly mutating genes are involved in immunity and reproduction.

Each protein that the human body manufactures is composed of a chain of at least 100 amino acids, and 29 % of these proteins are identical with chimpanzee proteins. Of the non-identical proteins, there are only two amino acid differences, on average, between human and chimp protein.

Another category of mutation concerns insertions and deletions (indels) and recent duplication of genetic material. Some of these changes are due to repeated sequences and some to sequences that moved to different genomic regions.

Changes to regulatory genes that

affect the timing of expression of a gene are also important differences between humans and chimps. There are about 5 million sites where nucleotides have been added or deleted. This gives a total of roughly 40 million changes between the two genomes. Somewhere in that litany of mutations lie the changes that made us human.

Darwin predicted that the African great apes were our closest relatives; this new evidence confirms that. The level of genomic differences between us (*Homo sapiens*) and chimps (*Pan troglodytes*) is similar to the differences between two mouse species, *Mus musculus* and *M. spretus*, yet the phenotypic differences between humans and chimps are vastly greater than between the mice species. Clearly we need to know a lot more about how genotype generates phenotype, and how phenotype is influenced by the environment.

It will take time for the full implications and potential of genomic comparisons to be realized, however here are a few examples of how this knowledge may be utilized. Chimps do not become sick from SIV (simian immunodeficiency virus). Humans die from AIDS caused by the closely related HIV-1. By aligning the genes that impact the immune system of the two species, it may be possible to learn how the relevant proteins produced by humans differ from those of the resistant chimp. This is a step in the direction of a treatment or even a cure; likewise with Alzheimer's disease.

Scientists have found a mutation that turns off the human caspase-12 gene. That gene is active in chimps and causes damaged cells to self-destruct. Chimps are not as susceptible to Alzheimer's as humans. Discovering a way to switch on the

caspase-12 gene could lead to prevention or treatment.

Philosophers have long asked the question "what makes us human?" Now we have a scientific method to address that question. Mutations in the genome of the human lineage leading to upright walking, brain enlargement, speech, social structure, etc. will eventually be identified and isolated. How these genes differ from the chimp lineage will help answer the question.

The religious idea known as Intelligent Design Creationism offers no research program for the future, no predictions, and cannot be tested scientifically since it advocates supernatural explanations that lay outside the scientific method. Genomic comparison joins the evidence from the fossil record, biogeography, comparative anatomy, physiology, and embryology and molecular systematics in supporting the theory of evolution which has aced every test to which it has been subjected.

Darwin had no idea of genes and chromosomes when he published his brilliant insight in 1859. He could not have imagined the elegant confirmation of evolution offered by genomic comparison of humans and chimpanzees. It is no wonder that the noted historian of science, Daniel Dennett, refers to the theory of evolution as the best idea anyone has ever had.

Tim M. Berra is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Evolution, Ecology, and Organismal Biology at The Ohio State University-Mansfield, and Research Associate at the Museum and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory in Darwin, Australia. He is the author of *Evolution and the Myth of Creationism*, (Stanford U. P. 1990)



The only debate on Intelligent Design that is worthy of its subject.

Moderator: We're here today to debate the hot new topic, evolution versus Intelligent Des--- (Scientist pulls out baseball bat.)

Moderator: Hey, what are you doing? (Scientist breaks Intelligent Design advocate's kneecap.)

Intelligent Design Advocate: YEAARRRGHHH!
YOU BROKE MY KNEECAP!

Scientist: Perhaps it only appears that I broke your kneecap. Certainly, all the evidence points to the hypothesis I broke your kneecap. For example, your kneecap is broken; it appears to be a fresh wound; and I am holding a baseball bat, which is spattered with your blood. However, a mere preponderance of evidence doesn't mean anything. Perhaps your kneecap was designed that way. Certainly, there are some features of the current situation that are inexplicable according to the "naturalistic" explanation you have just advanced, such as the exact contours of the excruciating pain that you are experiencing right now.

Intelligent Design advocate: AAAAH! THE PAIN!

Scientist: Frankly, I personally find it completely implausible that the random actions of a scientist such as myself could cause pain of this particular kind. I have no precise explanation for why I find this hypothesis implausible --- it just is. Your knee must have been designed that way!

Intelligent Design advocate: YOU BASTARD! YOU KNOW YOU DID IT!

Scientist: I surely do not. How can we know anything for certain? Frankly, I think we should expose people to all points of view. Furthermore, you should really re-examine whether your hypothesis is scientific at all: the breaking of your kneecap happened in the past, so we can't rewind and run it over again, like a laboratory experiment. Even if we could, it wouldn't prove that I broke your kneecap the previous time. Plus, let's not even get into the fact that the entire universe might have just popped into existence right before I said this sentence, with all the evidence of my alleged kneecap-breaking already preformed.

Intelligent Design advocate: That's a load of bullshit sophistry! Get me a doctor and a lawyer, not necessarily in that order, and we'll see how that plays in court!

Scientist (turning to audience): And so we see, ladies and gentlemen, when push comes to shove, advocates of Intelligent Design do not actually believe any of the arguments that they profess to believe. When it comes to matters that hit home, they

prefer evidence, the scientific method, testable hypotheses, and naturalistic explanations. In fact, they strongly privilege naturalistic explanations over supernatural hocus-pocus or metaphysical wankery. It is only within the reality-distortion field of their ideological crusade that they give credence to the flimsy, ridiculous arguments which we so commonly see on display. I must confess, it kind of felt good, for once, to be the one spouting free-form bullshit; it's so terribly easy and relaxing, compared to marshaling rigorous arguments backed up by empirical evidence. But I fear that if I were to continue, then it would be habit-forming, and bad for my soul. Therefore, I bid you adieu.

ATHEISTS IN FOXHOLES SONG

(to the tune of the *Marine Corp Hymn*)

For the Bill of Rights of our free land
For the Treaty of Tripoli
Many Atheists have fought and died
In the air, on land and sea
Atheists in many foxholes served
No task too hard to try
Give Atheists the thanks deserved
Don't dismiss them with a lie.

(to the tune of *The Army Goes Rolling Along*)

In the field, under sail
Atheists will never fail
Atheists were there all along
Helping us stay free
Protecting liberty
Lying about them is wrong.
So where e'er you go
People need to know
Lying about them is wrong
Where free people go
Let them always know
That Atheists are going along.

(to the tune of *The Navy Hymn*)

To Atheists who were so brave
Thank you for all you did to save
Our freedoms that permit a few
To lie about the things you do
From your foxholes hear and see
This thanks from those you helped keep free.

by Edwin Kagin

for the Atheists in Foxholes March Washington, D.C. 2005



God made me do it

After Brian Nichols grabbed a deputy's gun and shot his way out of the courthouse in Fulton County, Ga., killing four people, Ashley Smith was hailed as a hero. Smith, whom Nichols took hostage in her own apartment after his rampage, told police how she convinced him to surrender by talking about God and reading aloud from the book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*.

Now, Smith is putting out her own book, *Unlikely Angel: The Untold Story of the Atlanta Hostage Hero* (with Stacy Mattingly). She explains how she really got Nichols to cooperate: she gave him her supply of crystal methamphetamine. Smith admits she was a meth addict and had used the drug hours before she was taken hostage. "Do you smoke it? How do you do it?" Nichols asked her when she handed her stash over. She prepared the drug for him so he could snort it. "You gave him drugs, Ashley," she said to herself at the time, but, she says now, "God led me to do that." Smith received \$70,000 in rewards for capturing Nichols, and says she no longer takes drugs. (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*).

Supreme Court Question:

What are the Nominee's Views on Science?

Our request for questions that should be asked of Supreme Court nominees to elicit their views on science drew a huge response. Traditionally, nominees are not questioned about their religious views on the assumption that an oath to uphold the constitution makes the nominee's religious views irrelevant. Science, which bases judgements solely on the evidence, is the antithesis of religion and is clearly relevant. The WN staff felt the question that best captured the consensus of our readers' views in the fewest number of words was from Abi Soffer at SLAC:

"How does being descended from a monkey affect your judicial philosophy?"

WN will include more suggested questions each week until the confirmation process in the Senate is over.

– *What's New*, Robert L. Park, 21 October 2005

India: High Court lifts ban on Taslima Nasreen's book

The Calcutta High Court lifted the ban on Taslima Nasreen's book *Dwikhandita*. Two years ago the Communist state government of West Bengal ordered the forfeiture of the book under Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code (deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs). A three-judge Special Bench of the Calcutta High Court observed that the book did not fulfill any of the criteria described in this article and that the ban was not in accordance with law. The court also noted that the controversial passages in the book were limited to two pages only - page 49 and 50 - which did not play a central role within the whole 395-pages and could in no way justify the ban. Moreover, the book had been in circulation for quite some time without causing any incident of communal violence.

Dwikhandita (Split into Two) appeared in 2003 in the original Bengali language in Kolkata (Calcutta) as the third part of Taslima Nasreen's autobiography. It criticises the transformation of the author's country of origin, neighboring Bangladesh, from a secular state into an Islamic state and speaks bluntly about the brutal treatment of women under Islam. Taslima Nasreen had to flee Bangladesh in 1994, when militant fundamentalists threatened her life. She is still living in exile.

The lifting of the ban is a set back for the censor happy Left Front government under Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharjee (CPI-M). Trying to please his party's Muslim support base, he rushed to slap a ban on the disturbing book. In the night of 28 November 2003 he had Calcutta's bookshops raided and all available copies seized. The act of censorship was appreciated by the opposition (Congress party), but strongly criticized by the Indian Rationalist Association and other defenders of free expression.

-- ©*Rationalist International Bulletin* # 148 (12 October 2005)

Faith in government

Senator Sam Brownback has been more public than other Republican senators in raising questions about the nomination of Harriet Miers to a place on the Supreme Court. A prayer-group-Republican from Kansas who wants to be President, Brownback has an open mind on the question of religion in politics: you may be either a Protestant conservative, or conservative Catholic. Brownback, now Catholic, has been both.

– *What's New*, Robert L. Park, 14 October 2005



Council for Secular Humanism Urges Caution in Assessing the Nomination of Judge Alito

The Council for Secular Humanism is the largest organization in the world that defends the interests of non-religious people. Here in the United

States, we are dedicated to the separation of church of state, to the preservation of equal rights for both believers and non believers. Any government favoritism for religion betrays this ideal. We are thus concerned about the President's nomination of Judge Samuel Alito of the Third Circuit Federal Court of Appeals to the United States Supreme Court.

Judge Alito has ruled to uphold government-approved displays of religious symbols on two occasions. Also, his was the only vote 15 years ago to uphold a state law provision that would allow a husband to veto his wife's decision to have an abortion. The United States Supreme Court rejected this provision as unconstitutional in 1992.

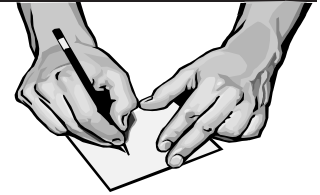
We have every right to make sure that Judge Alito will not cast votes eroding the precious liberties that have been law for 58 years. Whenever the question is one of the right of conscience in reproductive or religion-related matters, it is the Council's view that the constitution vests the individual and not any branch of government with ultimate decision making authority.

We urge our nation and the United States Senate to undertake the most thorough investigation of this nominee's positions before placing him on the High Court, a position in which even one vote can now make the difference between personal freedom or state-imposed tyranny.

Signed by: Paul Kurtz, Founder and Chairman
David Koepsell, Executive Director
Tom Flynn, Editor, *Free Inquiry*
Edward Tabash, Chair, First Amendment Task Force
Toni Van Pelt, Executive Director, CFI-Florida

Quote
•••••
A candidate for School Board responds:
• I support the teaching of science and that means
• evolution.
•
• -- Susan Cranley <sdcranley@cinci.rr.com>
•
••••• **Unquote**

Letters To The Editor



Dissent: Atheism with a capital "A":

To all my friends in Fig.

I must take issue with the "In The News" article by David Koepsell in the September *FigLeaves*. The court case "Kaufman v. McCaughtry" is not *A potential trap for secular humanists*, I regard it as an opportunity.

The decision of the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals was entirely correct in ruling that Atheism is for all legal purposes a religion. Christianity and other lower religions survive in the modern world only because they have the great advantage of government help and establishment-tax exemption is only a small part of the total package.

This court decision hands us the ball, and it is our opportunity to gain the same status as favored religions. The idea that "the rights of the non-religious should be equal to those of the religious" has as much chance of producing equality as the old ruling *separate but equal* had of achieving racial equality. Black Americans suffered for a hundred years before that terrible idea of "separate equality" was overthrown.

David Koepsell falls into an old trap that many Atheists fall into by accepting the negative terms heaped upon us by our pious adversaries. I certainly am not a "non-believer!" I believe in many things, love, kindness, hope, progress, humanity, America, and so on. So why should we accept negative descriptive terms, such as "unbeliever" simply because we do not believe irrational and ridiculous nonsense. To be perceived in our true light, Atheists must use our own terminology.

This court decision presents an opportunity, not a trap. Now that we may be regarded "for legal purposes" as a religion, let us immediately and forcefully demand the same privileges as the Established Religions. We must insist on 501(c)(3) church tax status, ask for Freethought Chaplains in the military services, in prisons, and before Congress, as well as the many other special benefits heaped upon established religions.

In 1996 I set forth my thinking in an article *The Higher Religions*, written in answer to a paper by Paul Kurtz in *Free Inquiry*. This article may be found at

<http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/emmett_fields/religion.html>

– Emmet F. Fields, Louisville, KY



Essay on Man

by Kurt Tucholsky (1899-1935), trans. Harry Zohn

Man has two legs and two sets of convictions: one for good times and one for bad ones. The latter is called Religion.

Man is a vertebrate animal and has an immortal soul, as well as a fatherland, just so he won't get too cocky.

Man is produced in a natural way, but he considers it unnatural and doesn't like to talk about it. He is made, but he isn't asked whether he wants to be.

Man is a useful creature, because he serves to make oil stocks rise through war casualties, to increase mine owners' profits through mining casualties, as well as serving culture, art, and science.

Besides the urges to procreate and to eat and drink, man has two passions: to make a row and not to listen. One could just about define man as a creature that never listens. A wise man does well not to listen, because he seldom gets to hear anything sensible. What men like to hear is promises, flattery, appreciation, and compliments. When flattering, it is advisable that one pile it on three grades thicker than one would think possible.

Man begrudges his kind everything, which is why he invented laws. He mustn't, so the others shouldn't either.

To rely on man, one does well to sit on him; then one is certain, at least for a while, that he won't run away. Some, to be sure, also rely on his character.

Man breaks down into two parts: a male part which doesn't want to think, and a female one which is unable to. Both have so-called emotions; the surest way to arouse them is to sensitize certain nerve spots of the organism. In such cases, some men secrete lyric poetry.

Man is a herbivorous and carnivorous creature. On North Pole expeditions he occasionally devours specimens of his own kind; but this is compensated for by Fascism.

Man is a political animal which likes best to spend its life massed into clumps. Each clump hates the other clumps because they are the others, and hates its own clump because it is its own. This latter hatred is called Patriotism.

Every man has a liver, a spleen, a pair of lungs, and a flag; all four organs are vital. There are said to be men without a liver or a spleen and with only one lung, there are no men without a flag.

Man likes to stimulate weak procreative activity, and for this he has various resources: bullfights, crime, sports, and jurisprudence.

Men conjointly do not exist. There are only men who master and others who are mastered. But not one has yet mastered himself, because the opposing slave is always mightier than the domineering master. Every man is his own inferior.

When a man feels that he can no longer kick up his heels, he becomes pious and wise; then he gives up the sour grapes of the world. This is called contemplation. Man's various stages of life regard one another as different races; oldsters usually have forgotten that they were young once or they forget that they are old, and young people never comprehend that they can grow old.

Man doesn't like to die because he doesn't know what happens afterward. If he imagines he does, he still doesn't like to die, because he wants to continue for a little while longer in the old way. For "a little while longer," read "forever."

For the rest, man is a creature that knocks, makes bad music, and lets his dog bark. Sometimes he leaves one in peace, but then he is dead.

Besides men there are Saxons and Americans, but we won't take them up until next year, when we have Zoology.



When I was a kid my dad would say, "Emo, do you believe in the Lord?" I'd say, "Yes!" He'd say, "Then stand up and shout Hallelujah!" So I would ... and I'd fall out of

the roller coaster.

—Emo Phillips

Quote

• A Religion?

• The gun lobby, oh my peaceful friends, you may hate, but first you had better understand that it is a religion, only secondarily connected to the Bill of Rights. • The thickheaded, sometimes even close to tearful, gaze you get when chatting with one of its partisans emanates from the view that they're holding a piece of God. There is no persuading them otherwise, even by a genius, because a life without guns implies the end of the known world to them. Any connection they make to our "pioneer past" is also a fraud, a wistful apology. Folks love a gun for what it can do. A murderer always thinks it was an accident, he says, as if a religious episode had passed over him.

— Barry Hannah, *Bats out of Hell* (1993) p. 83

Unquote



THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



The **Association for Rational Thought (ART)** is sponsoring a free meeting *Tour and History of the Cincinnati Observatory* by John Ventre This will fit in well with the science club book this month. Afterwards those who want will gather at a nearby restaurant that we will decide upon at that time. The Observatory requests a voluntary \$2 donation per person.

DATE: Saturday, November 12

TIME: 10:00am - 12:00pm

PLACE: Cincinnati Observatory

3489 Observatory Pl., Hyde Park, Cincinnati

For further information, please contact Bryan at (513) 385-6795

Science Book Club: November - Sunday Nov 20 before Thanksgiving (3rd Sunday)

at BUFFALO JACKS Restaurant north of Dayton, Ohio.

137 S. High St. Covington, OH 45318

PHONE (937) 473-2524 WEBSITE:

http://www.buffalock.com/buff_jack/index.html

Jerry Wiles is leading discussion of

Eyes on the Universe: a History of the Telescope by Isaac Asimov, 1975

We have a reservation for a private room at Buffalo Jack's at 2:30 Sunday, Nov. 20. It is located in Covington, Ohio, 68 miles north of the I-75 / I-275 interchange and about 30 miles north of Dayton on SR 48 in Covington.

For those of you who do not want to make the long drive on your own, some of us are car pooling just north of Tri County at 1:15 at the Rave Theaters parking lot at Union Center Blvd just off I-75. Take the 1st exit off I-75 just north of I-275, turn right on Union Center Blvd and take an immediate right into the shopping center parking lot. To make the trip on your own drive north on I-75 past Dayton and past I-70. From I-75 in Troy, Ohio, (24 miles north of Dayton) take exit 74 and turn left (northwest) onto SR 41 (W. Main St.) Drive for about 8 miles to SR 48



(a "Stop" dead end intersection) at Covington, Ohio. Turn right (north) on SR 48 (High St.) through the traffic signal and about 25 yards further.

After the meeting we will be eating dinner there and partaking of the exotic food. For those of you who are not adventurous diners, they also have standard American fare.

For further information, please contact Bryan at (513) 385-6795.

In **December** we will again meet in room 3A at the Cincinnati downtown library at 2:30 on Sunday Dec 18 (**3rd Sunday**) - *The Science of Good and Evil : Why People Cheat, Gossip, Care, Share, and Follow the Golden Rule* by Michael Shermer, 2004

The Cincinnati Atheists November Meetup

When: Tuesday, 15 November at 8:00PM

Where: Joseph-Beth Booksellers

2692 Madison Rd. Rookwood Pavillion

Cincinnati OH 45207

513-396-8966

For Good Food and Great Talk - Host a Potluck!

This is an opportunity to open your cherished home for up to 20 people on the second Tuesday (or so) of the month from about 6:30 to about 9PM. Your guests will provide the food if you provide plates (paper is ok), silverware (plastic is okay) and drinks with cups (& ice). The first Tuesday we have open is for December, with more potlucks available for 2006.

If you would like to host a potluck and have additional questions or would like to volunteer, please contact Nurit Bowman to discuss dates and place.

Hosts for Potlucks Needed!



A Catholic, a Jew, and an Episcopalian are lined up at the pearly gates. The Catholic begs to enter, but God says, "Nope, sorry." "Why not?" asks the Catholic, "I've tried to be good." "Well, you ate meat on a Friday in Lent, so I can't let you in." Then the Jew walks up and God refuses him too. The Jew wants an explanation, so God replies: "There was a time you ate pork. Sorry, but I can't let you in either." Then the Episcopalian goes up and asks to be let in, and God again says no. "Why not?" asks the Episcopalian, "what did I do wrong?" "Well," says God, "you once ate your entrée with the salad fork."



BOOK REVIEW

Evolution: The Remarkable History of a Scientific Theory
by Edward J. Larson
(New York: Modern Library, 2004)

At the center of the history of the theory of evolution stands of course Charles Darwin who formulated a comprehensive interpretation how living species could evolve by a trial and error process in which the better adapted individuals survive to propagate. There exists a long history of speculation about evolution before Darwin, and a long history after Darwin as the theory became gradually accepted and eventually considered as fact. Larson takes us through the chapters and insights of this remarkable history of science.

Before Darwin, the developing geological record, the succession of rock formations and the plethora of fossils there enclosed provided a strong indication of change in animal species over time. A number of scholars saw the need for evolutionary development, although others adhered rigidly to the notion of successive catastrophes. The common inspiration of evolution thinkers, and the most important pre-Darwinian author was Jean Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet, chevalier de Lamarck (1744-1829). In 1802 he published a comprehensive "transmutation hypothesis," later simply known as "Lamarckism," which rested on the assumption of the inheritance of characteristics acquired in life. Since only the male sperm and female egg enter into the making of an offspring, it is difficult to see how life experiences could affect these germ cells. Lamarckism was discredited within the authors lifetime, yet his ideas lingered into the twentieth century.

Because so much has been written about Charles Darwin, Larson spends relatively few pages on his life and how he grasped the ideas of descent with variation. The book concentrates on Darwin's followers, Thomas Henry Huxley in Britain, Ernst Haeckel in Germany, and Asa Gray in America, who in contrast to most other "Darwinians" did not lose his faith but remained a devoted Christian. Yet by the first decade of the twentieth century the Darwinian mechanisms of species formation, natural selection, had become largely discredited.

Larson then continues to describe the history of scientific work and discoveries which advanced evolutionary knowledge. This includes particularly the work of Gregor Mendel, Thomas Hunt Morgan, Ronald Fisher, Sewall Wright, Ernst Mayr, Theodosius Dobzhansky, George Gaylord Simpson and ends with Edward O. Wilson. This is the history of the modern synthesis of evolutionary science which largely confirmed and extended Darwin's insights.

Unlike most historians, who tend to leave out the mistaken opponents and pseudo-science cranks, Larson gives us the full story of the resistance to and politics of the anti-evolution crowd. He describes the early, scientific opponents of evolutionary findings, Georges Cuvier, Richard Owen, and Louis Agassiz. The idea of competition and survival of the fittest fit the spirit of the late Victorian Age of capitalism. Thus Herbert Spencer applied Darwinism to his ideas of struggle among individual humans in society and to competition among nations. Social Darwinism is strongly identified with this author, yet he published his breakthrough book, *Social Statics*, in 1851, ie. well before *Origin of Species* in 1859.

Darwin himself, and several of his immediate followers lost their faith in religion. Others like Asa Gray remained faithful. Fisher clung to his Anglican heritage, Dobzhansky remained with the Orthodox church and Haldane considered Hinduism. "In practice, acceptance of the modern synthesis coexisted with all manner of religious faith."(p. 251) Larson also takes a look at the religious resistance in the United States, and provides a look at the Scopes Trial. Larson is the author of *Summer for the gods: the Scopes trial and America's continuing debate over science and religion*, a complete history of the issue. He continues with a look at the "modern" creationists, and even has some words on Trofim Lysenko who revived Lamarckim under the Russian dictatorship of Stalin.

Evolution is an extremely well written book, clear in the timeline of thought, and easy to read.

— Wolf Roder

:Quote.....
• All the same, they [books] do serve some purpose.
• Culture doesn't save anything or anyone, it doesn't justify. But it's a product of man: he projects himself into it, he recognizes himself in it; that critical mirror alone offers him his image.
• Jean-Paul Sartre, Les Mots (The Words) [1964]
.....**Unquote**



FIG Leaves
P.O. Box 19034
Cincinnati, OH 45219

FIG

Our Purpose

The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. (FIG) is a non-profit organization founded in 1991. FIG is allied with the Council for Secular Humanism as well as an affiliate of the American Humanist Association and of the American Atheists.

Though most of our members are secular humanists, we welcome to our meetings anyone interested in learning about or furthering our purpose.



To foster a community of secular humanists dedicated to improving the human condition through rational inquiry and creative thinking unfettered by superstition, religion, or any form of dogma.

In accordance with our purpose, we have established the following goals:

- To provide a forum for intelligent exchange of ideas for those seeking fulfillment in an ethical secular life.
- To develop through open discussion the moral basis of a secular society and encourage ethical practices within our own membership and the community at large.
- To inform the public regarding secular alternatives to supernatural interpretations of the human condition.
- To support and defend the principles of democracy, free speech, and separation of church and state as expressed in the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights.

For more information, write the Free Inquiry Group at the address above, e-mail figinfo@gofigger.org, or leave a message at (513) 557-3836. Visit our web site at gofigger.org.